

# PART ONE PERSONAL SKILLS

## CHAPTER

# 1

## Organizational Behavior and Your Personal Effectiveness

### OBJECTIVES

#### KNOWING

#### DOING

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

“If you want to be a great manager, the most fundamental lesson is that it starts with you. Know yourself. Listen to feedback. Build on your strengths. Do what you say you will do. Build a network of support. Be positive. If we can find people who do those things well, they tend ultimately to be successful managers.”

—Al Oak, Chief Executive Officer, Cripe Architects & Engineers

- KO 1-1** Recognize the importance of people skills and cultures for achieving business success.
- KO 1-2** Understand how organizational behavior knowledge and evidence is the source of effective management and interpersonal skills.
- KO 1-3** Appreciate the cost of bad managers and toxic organizations.
- KO 1-4** Understand how self-awareness and personal effectiveness are the first building blocks of great management.
- KO 1-5** Know the fundamentals of professional behavior.

- DO 1-1** Make a compelling case that applied OB and management skills can lead to higher personal and business performance.
- DO 1-2** Use proven methods of self-management to make personal improvements.
- DO 1-3** Seek feedback at every opportunity and focus largely on your strengths as the source of your personal success.
- DO 1-4** Act professionally in ways that distinguish you among your colleagues.
- DO 1-5** Build a personal network that enhances your effectiveness and ability to get things done.

### Case: eHarmony

Founded in 1998 by Dr. Neil Warren and his son-in-law, Greg Forgatch, eHarmony was targeted to a segment of the e-dating market that had not been well served: singles seeking serious and sustainable relationships. That is, unlike other e-dating sites emerging at the time, the key selling point of eHarmony was matching people on the basis of *long-term* compatibility.

In an effort to create such long-lasting matches, Warren and his team felt they had to get much more information on singles than had been typically solicited by matchmaking services. Toward that end, before the launch of their website, they surveyed over 2,000 couples in an effort to discern the most critical personal information required to successfully match people for the long term. The result was the creation of the eHarmony Relationship Questionnaire, which had to be filled out by anyone who wanted to become an eHarmony member. Although originally much longer, today the questionnaire is 258 questions and takes about 45 minutes to complete.

Dr. Warren claims that the length of the questionnaire and the involvement required is an important part

of the process because, since it is so time-consuming to sign up, eHarmony people self-select. This means that only those willing to go through the extensive process are ultimately included on the site. As Dr. Warren notes, "There is a shared sense of investment to be part of eHarmony. A full completion of the questionnaire says in effect, 'I'm really serious about this . . .'"

Today, eHarmony is millions of members strong and claims tens of thousands of successful matches. TV commercials regularly trumpet the success of their system and the many wonderful long-term matches and marriages that have resulted.

1. Relative to other matchmaking services, why has eHarmony been so successful?
2. What is it about the eHarmony approach that seems to promote long-term matches? Why is self-awareness so important here?
3. What are the most important things you would want to know

about a potential partner? If you were to see two eHarmony profiles, what would be the most important aspects of a match? For example, would you look solely for shared interests and preferences?

4. List a few questions that you think might be on the eHarmony relationship questionnaire.
5. If you were to become an eHarmony member, would you be fully honest, or put a positive spin on your profile? Similarly, would you post a "touched up" picture? In that regard, critique the following post with respect to the individual's and eHarmony's goals: "Bald, short, fat, and ugly male, 53, seeks short-sighted woman with tremendous sexual appetite."
6. Pretend you are to match two members of your class team. Gather some information, hypothetically make the match, and then reflect on how you went about the matchmaking process.

## < < BUILDING SELF-AWARENESS FOR LOVE AND PROFIT

# MANAGE WHAT?

## 1. Making the Business Case for People Management Skills

You have been asked to serve on a committee at your firm and make recommendations for cutting costs in response to a weak economy and a downturn in revenue. The very first meeting is kicked off by your company president who goes around to each committee member with the goal of identifying any “untouchables.” That is, those areas that committee members feel should be off limits to cuts or at least targeted as a last resort. Unfortunately, you are seated at the immediate right of your president and he asks you to go first. You take the opportunity to suggest that the firm should do nothing that would detract from the quality of people management you have or erode the people-oriented culture. You even quote from your long-lost organizational behavior textbook (burned in a weenie roast celebration years ago) that “*Few things matter more to the success of a firm than the way people feel about how they are managed.*” The president seems to accept this.

But the VP of Research and Technology is so angry he is about to burst a blood vessel. He rises and in an angry tone says, “With all due respect, I have to say that all this stuff about the importance of people management strikes me as nonsense. I have nothing against our management development efforts, but if you give me the same amount of money for new technology and research funding, I will turn it in to far more of a benefit for this firm than we will get from trying to improve our managerial performance. In fact, I have two specific problems: (1) I see no connection between the quality of our people management and important outcomes that relate to our “bottom line,” and (2) good people management is so fuzzy that there really is no way to determine who is doing a good job and who is not, anyway.”

The president nods. “Hmm, he may have a point.” He then looks at you and says, “I suspect you disagree. So go ahead and make a business case for me as to why we *should* devote significant resources to building better people management and a people-oriented culture. But I don’t want any soft ‘touchy-feely’ babble. Be specific and use examples.”

## 2. Using OB Evidence Instead of Just Intuition

You have heard so many stories of bad managers and read so many accounts of poor decisions that you are determined to be more “evidence-based” in your own organizational career. But why are more decisions not made on good research evidence? How do you go about finding more evidence? Where would you find such evidence, and how might you apply it to commonly faced managerial situations such as how to set appropriate goals, motivate high effort, or build strong employee commitment and a high-performance culture?

## 3. Making a Personal Improvement

You have been in your first job for two years and are itching to get promoted as quickly as possible. In your last performance review, however, your boss identified time management as a weakness. You have never felt that your time management was superb, but you did not know that weakness might affect your career advancement. In any case, you are now committed to improving your management of time. However, realizing that old habits die hard and that accomplishing personal change is very difficult, you know you will have to do more than just “hope” to change.

So how would you proceed to improve yourself? What would you do first? What strategies would give you the best chance of actually improving your time management skills significantly?

## 4. Describing Yourself and Your Style: Expanding Your Self-Awareness

“Tell us about yourself” is the first query in your introductory meeting with the four people who will be reporting to you in your new managerial job. You naturally struggle with where to start. You have been a great individual contributor for four years, but everyone has told you that managing people is a very different responsibility. And the thing that really scares you is you have heard sarcastic joking around the firm about a colleague who got promoted to manager and how with that promotion the firm “lost its best analyst and found its worst manager.”

So what should you tell the group about yourself and how you will manage? What would be most relevant and useful? Based on your own self-assessment, what particular characteristics would you highlight? What should you be doing to know yourself even better so you can answer this question more confidently in the future? What would it be like to be managed by you?

KO 1-1

## Introduction

KO 1-2

If you’re like most students who are new to management courses, you’re probably preparing to be totally *underwhelmed* and perhaps a little skeptical about what this text and course have to offer. Our experience tells us that you probably

KO 1-3

come to this course with at least one of the following concerns (or perhaps complaints). First, you may be concerned about the overall usefulness of the knowledge contained within this text. In fact, you may have heard from others that your management course will be nothing more than common sense, bloated theory, and will be essentially a “blow off.” Even if you haven’t heard such things about this course, you might feel that at the end of the day management can’t be taught. Unlike say, accounting, where there are clearly specified rules and principles to follow, you may believe that management isn’t something that can be taught in a course, much less from a textbook. Second, as you look out at the decades of organizational work-life ahead of you, management may seem so very unimportant compared to functional areas like finance, marketing and accounting. These functions, after all, represent the major departments or units in organizations and they house critical jobs—the very jobs recruiters are posting to fill. Third, you may feel that your career is going to be one that is built on your technical expertise and managing others is simply not something you want to do or will ever do. As such, you might feel like this course is just one more in a long line of required educational obligations on the road to getting your degree. You are not alone if you have such concerns and we are not surprised—we face such skepticism prior to every course we teach. Indeed it was our sense that Organizational Behavior and Management courses are undervalued by business students (at every level)—relative to the importance of those topics for success in the real world—that stoked our passion for a new kind of textbook. Specifically, the idea for this book was born out of three important observations we shared from our collective experience of teaching organizational behavior and management courses to college students and practicing managers.

1. ***Managing people is a distinct and critically important skill set.*** Our most influential business leaders have always recognized that management and *people skills*—not just financial and technical knowledge—are critically important to the success of individuals and organizations. Yet, as we will discuss shortly, such skills often do not get the educational attention they warrant.
2. ***Evidence for the importance of management may be less accessible to you, but is nonetheless abundant and clear.*** The research evidence is overwhelmingly clear that the possession of management skills creates a competitive advantage for individuals and organizations. Although management skills appear on the surface to be relatively straightforward, the chief complaint of most senior leaders is that they can’t find enough competent people-managers.
3. ***Most OB and management textbooks do not focus on developing the most critical management skills.*** Sadly, most existing books and courses on managing organizational behavior are not well suited to helping students develop and refine the skills they really need to become great managers. Most textbooks are accurate, informative, and descriptive but lack a decision- or action-oriented approach that allows for real skill development.

With those observations in mind, we insisted that the focus of this book be on the *application* of organizational behavior evidence to the skills required to be a great manager and organizational contributor. That is, we do not want you to just *know* and understand a book full of ideas—we want you to be able to *do* something with that knowledge.

A simple philosophy that permeates this book is that organizations succeed through people. If there is one ultimate truth of organizational life it is this: Organizations big and small, public or private, for profit and not, only succeed when

KO 1-4

DO 1-1

*“Take away my people, but leave my factory, and soon grass will grow on the factory floor. Take away my factory, but leave my people, and soon we will have a new and better factory.”*

—Andrew Carnegie

*“I will pay more for the ability to handle people than for any other talent under the sun.”*

—John D. Rockefeller

their people succeed. A great product doesn't market itself—great marketing people do. A new accounting practice doesn't implement itself—outstanding accountants do. An organization doesn't simply grow sales—salespeople increase their productivity. And yet despite this simple principle, a recipe for how to get people to succeed (and thus organizations) remains incredibly elusive. To be certain, there is not one formula or playbook that leads people to be successful in organizations. But the best chance organizations have for creating successful people is by finding and nurturing great managers. The most successful organizations are those with work environments that are personally fulfilling, rewarding, and challenging. And the single most important factor in creating such successful environments is great managers.

Of course not all managers are very good, or for that matter even competent. Indeed, we laugh at the clueless antics of managers in comic strips like *Dilbert*, movies like *Office Space*, and television shows like *The Office*. In these examples, and perhaps from your own personal experiences with bad bosses, we see the impact on people and firms when managers act in dysfunctional ways. In real life, however, such managers have a toxic effect on the people they manage, as well as their own careers, and it's far from a laughing matter. In the following sections, we will talk about what managers do to be successful and how organizational behavior knowledge is a contributing factor.

## Success Through People Management

The hero or heroine in this text is that of a manager. You might find that to be a bit odd given most people's reaction to the word "manager." For decades, the term "management" has had a decidedly negative connotation. Consider the following account by Professor Denise Rousseau, former President of the Academy of Management:<sup>1</sup>

Management was a nasty word in my blue collar childhood, where everyone in the family was affected by how the company my father worked for managed its employees. When the supervisor frequently called my father to ask him to put in more overtime in an already long work week, all of us kids got used to covering for him. If the phone rang when my father was home, he'd have us answer it. We all knew what to say if it was the company calling: "Dad's not here." The idea of just telling the supervisor that he didn't want to work never occurred to my father, or anyone else in the family. The threat of disciplinary action or job loss loomed large, reinforced by dinner-time stories about a boss's abusive behavior or some inexplicable company action.

The term "manager" can evoke notions of a person who is power hungry and incompetent and can't do "real" work themselves. This reputation of managers as people who abuse and exploit their subordinates and care only about their own personal success and advancement has been reinforced over the decades by real anecdotes of bad bosses.<sup>2</sup> These negative connotations of managers are unfortunate because volumes of research studies and organizational examples have shown that when managers get it right, employees, organizations, customers and the managers themselves all win. For example, meta-analytic studies (that is, the syntheses of many studies) have demonstrated that the financial performance of organizations is positively associated with management practices like selective hiring, succession planning, reward systems, performance management, and training and development.<sup>3</sup> Other research indicates that managers are a key component in reducing high employee-related costs, such as turnover and counterproductive behaviors (for example, theft and the abuse of resources), as well as increasing employee and team performance, cooperative behaviors, commitment, and employee satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> Still other studies have shown that personal career outcomes, such as speed of progression and leadership effectiveness, stem



from competent and supportive management.<sup>5</sup> Finally, it is also clear that *poor* management practices (see the section “Management Live 1.1”), such as abusive supervision and harassment, have substantial harmful effects on individuals and their organizations, resulting in counterproductive behavior, low performance, and psychological stress, as well as career derailment and financial loss.<sup>6</sup>

Management skills are also the key elements in what makes for healthy and desirable workplaces. Indeed, the Great Place To Work Institute (GPTWI), which conducts the research on the nation’s best employers for *Fortune* magazine’s “100 Best Companies to Work for in America” annual article, has found that the single most important element of every great workplace is the trust between employees and management.<sup>9</sup> Such trust stems from the managers’ skill level in those organizations. GPTWI research has found that workplaces with great managers receive more qualified job applications for open positions, experience less turnover, have lower health care costs, enjoy higher levels of customer satisfaction, and induce greater customer loyalty.

While you may not be familiar with the research evidence, we hope none of it comes as a huge shock to you. Anyone would rather have a good manager than an incompetent one. You probably know of someone who is technically or analytically skilled but has few “people skills,” or is de-motivating, or cannot “get along well with others.” Few of us would refute that it takes a competent manager to lead groups who go the extra mile required to achieve highly satisfied customers, and so on.

But, having taught OB and management courses for many years, what we find is not typically intuitive to most aspiring managers is that good management is so essential to good *business*. Management is often characterized as being elementary or “just common sense,” but great management is neither common nor easy, and the existence of so many ineffective managers and toxic organizations attests to that. Indeed, as important as they may be, management skills have proven stubbornly hard to develop; thus making great managers and management rare commodities. Some estimates indicate that nearly 50 percent of

## MANAGEMENT LIVE 1.1

### What Is the Real Cost of a Bad Manager?

A recent advance in research on learning and education is known as *value added* analysis. It uses standardized test scores to look at how much the academic performance of students in a given teacher’s classroom changes between the beginning and end of the year.<sup>7</sup> Accumulating evidence suggests that students of a very bad teacher will learn, on average, half a year’s worth of material in one school year. On the other hand, the students in the class of a very good teacher will learn a year and a half’s worth of material—and the cost to the school district of those two teachers is (usually) roughly the same. Moreover, while the United States currently is behind many developed nations in student test performance, researchers have estimated that the gap could be closed simply by replacing the bottom 6 to 10 percent of teachers with others of just average quality.<sup>8</sup>

We believe that this same type of value-added approach and mindset is long overdue in management education—and the urgency is great. Given the dismal scores found in recent research on applied management knowledge (see “Management Live 1.3”), imagine the productivity lost and the number of people who have spent time working for an incompetent manager. What truly is the cost of a bad manager? More importantly, what is the *value* of competent ones? The accumulating evidence reveals that organizations can no longer afford to neglect the development of its managers—the costs are simply too high.

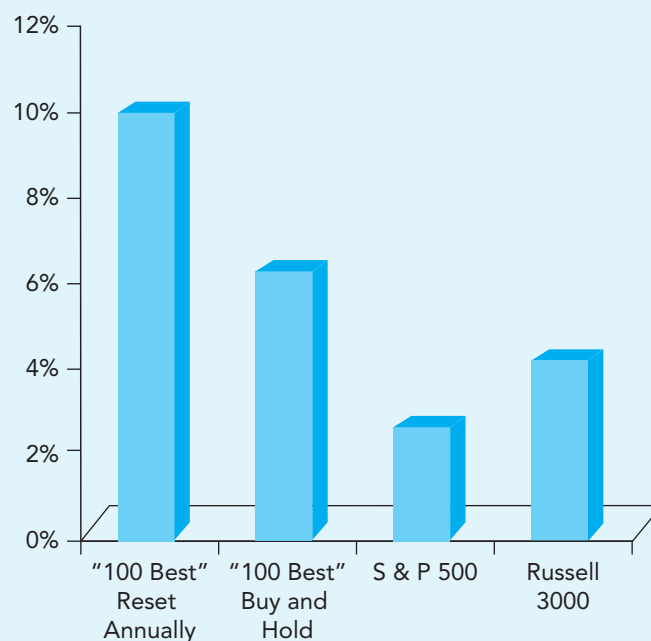
people moved into management roles essentially fail.<sup>10</sup> In other rather depressing surveys, over half of employees have reported they were less than satisfied with their current manager and many noted that the worst aspect of their job was their immediate boss.<sup>11</sup> Some even rated their manager as “remarkably bad.” The same skills that will advance your career also happen to be the skills that make an organization a great place to work. And the best places to work also happen to be the highest performing firms. That’s the good news. The bad news is that the reason management skills create a competitive advantage for people and organizations is because they are hard to master and are therefore still quite uncommon.

## MANAGEMENT LIVE 1.2

### The Best Places to Work Are Also the Best Performing Companies

Independent financial analysts have studied the financial performance of the “100 Best” companies beginning with the publication of the book, *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America* (by Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz, 1994), and have accompanied that with each of the “100 Best Companies” lists from *Fortune* since that list’s inception in 1998. Using various profitability indicators, these data illustrate the extent to which the publicly traded 100 Best Companies consistently outperform major stock indices over the 10-year periods preceding the publication of the 100 Best lists. It is notable that those companies selected for the 100 Best list generally spend far more on employee benefits and services than their counterparts—that is, it is often *expensive* to be a best place to work. However, the data clearly support that the expense is worthwhile because people ultimately engage more fully, work productively, and lift company performance.

#### 100 Best Companies to Work For vs. Overall Stock Market 1998–2010



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TABLE 1.1

**Managerial Reality 1:** *Management is the process of getting things done through others.* This means that your primary role as a manager is to manage other people. Sometimes organizations lose sight of this and ask managers to engage in substantial technical work leaving little room for this primary people-management role. This is, by and large, a costly mistake.

**Managerial Reality 2:** *Managers get rewarded for what their employees do, not for what managers do.* In other words, your success as a manager occurs only when others succeed. To the extent you can make others successful in their jobs will determine how successful you are as a manager.

**Managerial Reality 3:** *People join organizations but they leave managers.* Managers play such an important role in peoples' work life that it is almost trite to suggest that when people leave organizations they do so, in part, because their manager has failed them; failed to find ways to challenge them, promote them, reward them, and provide good opportunities.

**Managerial Reality 4:** *People generally manage the way they themselves have been managed.* As we discuss later in the chapter, we learn by watching. If you have had great bosses in your previous work experience, you should be excited about your prospects to be an effective manager. If on the other hand, your managerial models have been largely ineffective, you will likely have to work extra hard to break away from their methods.

**Managerial Reality 5:** *People problems are far more complex than any other organizational problem.* When asked what keeps managers awake at night, the response is rarely, "We don't know how to market a product well" or "I'm not sure how we'll integrate our software system with the old legacy system" Rather, the response is almost always about *people*, "Jim is a great performer, but he's a lousy teammate," "Marsha's husband has cancer so she's taking six weeks off. How will I get others to take on her work?" and so forth.

## The Central Role of Management in Organizations

One of the reasons that good management is so hard is that few managers, particularly aspiring ones, are forced to confront the realities of management early enough to understand them. In Table 1.1 we outline these primary managerial realities.



*"Then I made the leap from skilled labor to unskilled management."*

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Managing people is indeed complex work requiring a wide variety of competencies. These competencies can generally be sorted into one of three broad categories: Conceptual, Technical/Administrative, and Interpersonal.<sup>12</sup>

**Conceptual Competencies.** Managerial work requires that managers collect and analyze an enormous amount of information. Such information is used to diagnose problems, formulate plans, integrate ideas, and the examine effectiveness of current practices.

**Technical/Administrative Competencies.** Effective management requires that managers be well equipped to understand the functions of business such as accounting, operations, and marketing. Importantly, managers must use their technical/administrative expertise to coordinate activities.

**Interpersonal Competencies.** Managers are required to interact with, influence, and lead others. To do so, managers must possess competencies that allow them to negotiate conflict, communicate, motivate, and develop other people—competencies that require managers to manage relationships with others.

According to the results of a recent large-scale study of 52 managerial occupations in the U.S. labor force, all managers' jobs, regardless of occupation (for example, Financial Manager, Funeral Director, CEO, and so on), require proficiency in these three categories of competencies to be successful. That is not to say that managerial jobs do not differ in their skill requirements; they do. In particular, managerial roles differ substantially in the type of technical expertise required for a given role. For example, although all managers must coordinate activities among employees, sales managers are not coordinating the same activities as production managers. So by and large, managerial work, regardless of the occupation, is more the same than it is different. This is generally good news as the skills discussed in this book are largely applicable to any managerial role you will ever fill. It is certainly true that you will need to gain expertise in the technical skills associated with the particular occupational role you assume, but the skills presented throughout this book will support your success in that role by helping build your conceptual and interpersonal managerial competencies. Further, although such competencies are essential for those wanting to be great managers, our experience is that these competencies are also critical to those wanting virtually any type of career that involves substantial interaction with people (for instance, nurse, sales representative, engineer). Moreover, while such competencies are certainly necessary for *future* success, we would also contend they should have an impact on your performance *right now*. Decision making, teamwork, conflict management, and others are fundamental to most any line of work.

## Playing for Keeps: Getting Serious About OB Right Now

One of the problems we face as management educators is, quite frankly, trying to help our students understand the importance of starting now to develop their managerial skills. The reason for this is twofold. First, students are rightly focused on their first role after college which is not likely to entail full-blown management responsibility. Thus, it's hard to capture students' attention when recruiters are on campus seeking applicants for individual contributor roles such as a staff accountant, marketing specialist or financial analyst position. Second, we find that students simply aren't aware of how competitive managerial skills will make them in the market place and how absolutely detrimental the lack of

such skills will be to their early careers and beyond. In order to explain this second point more fully, we need to take a quick detour and look at a few important studies about managerial skills and success on the job.

All managers deploy their skills to manage six key general work activities at work, which are as follows:<sup>13</sup> (1) *managing human capital* (for example, staffing, motivating, leading, performance management, and so on); (2) *managing tools and technology* (for example, production, operations, information technology); (3) *managing decision-making processes* (for example, gathering information, analyzing data, conducting research); (4) *managing administrative activities* (for example, budgeting, financial management and control); (5) *managing strategy/innovation* (for example, future planning, product development, strategic decisions); and (6) *managing the task environment* (for example, public relations, marketing).

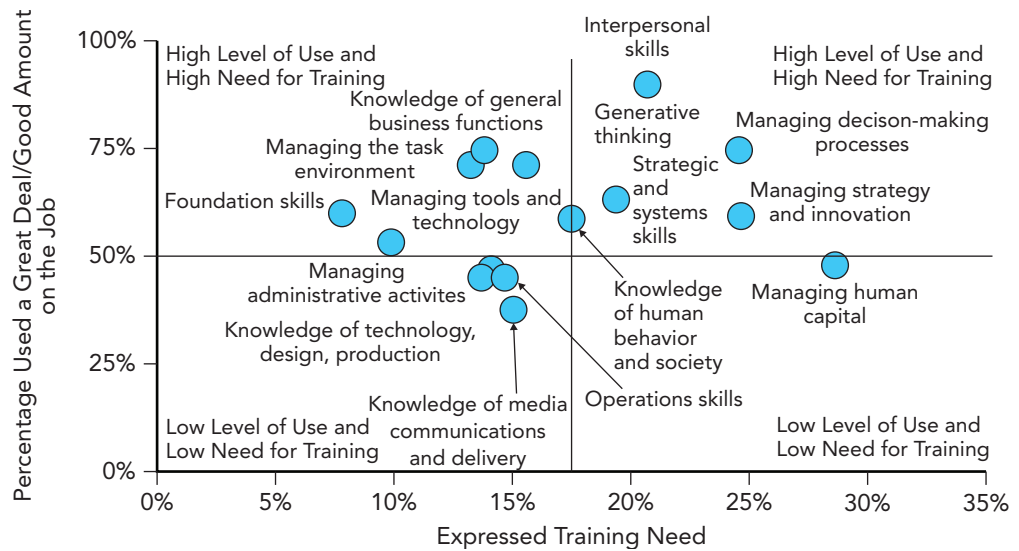
Which of these six activities do you think are most critical or important to a manager's success? In a recent study utilizing U.S. Department of Labor data from 8,000 managers across all managerial occupations, professors Erich Dierdorff, Robert Rubin, and Fredrick Morgeson found that while all six activities are seen as important, *managing human capital* and *managing decision-making processes* were rated by managers as being significantly more important than the rest. This means that to be successful in a managerial role you will need to pay particularly close attention to how to manage people and gather and analyze information that will enable effective decision making.

In another study, researchers from the Center for Creative leadership tracked young professionals who were viewed by their organizations as having high potential to reach the executive ranks in Fortune 500 organizations.<sup>14</sup> The study followed these professionals over a 20-year period and sought to understand why some of them (all of whom were seen initially as having great potential) did not make it to the top echelon of their organization. The results generated five major themes for why these managers were "derailed" or fell off the track leading to the top: (1) failure to *meet their business objectives* over time; they simply were not consistent about reaching their goals; (2) they showed an *inability to build and lead a team* as they progressed in the organization; (3) they exhibited an *inability to develop, change, and adapt* with the changing times; (4) despite moving into broad management roles, they retained a *narrow functional/technical orientation*; and (5) they displayed consistent *problems with interpersonal relationships*. Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that the rise to the top of a Fortune 500 organization certainly involves getting results, but to do so professionals rely heavily on their ability to manage relationships with others.

So it's clear from these two powerful studies that interpersonal skills, so-called "people-skills," must be mastered to achieve long-term success in managerial roles. Why then aren't students knocking down the doors of management professors and enrolling in elective courses where these skills are learned, as opposed to taking yet another finance class? Maybe it's that recruiters simply don't care about skills involved with managing people and thus students don't pursue it because there's no immediate payoff. The evidence suggests just the opposite, however. In a study of 1,300 recruiters, these recruiters rated interpersonal skills, leadership, communication and adaptability as the *most desirable* yet *scarcest* skills present in today's graduates. These recruiters claim that the possession of such skills is rare among graduates and that recruiters routinely struggle to find these skills in the marketplace of talent.

We have observed that students often think that they can pick up these managerial skills at some later time or that perhaps they'll learn them on the job. Once again, the evidence doesn't support such a conclusion. In one study, MBA alumni cohorts spanning a five-year period were asked how often they used various skills and what skill areas they felt needed additional training. The results of that

**FIGURE 1.1**  
**MBA Skills Acquisition**  
**in School and Skills**  
**Use after Graduation:**  
**A Gap Analysis**



Source: 2007 Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC). *MBA Alumni Perspectives Survey*.

study revealed a significant skills gap between what is currently being covered in MBA programs and what people report that they ultimately need when they get on the job. That result is illustrated in Figure 1.1 in the upper-right quadrant, which represents the skills MBA alumni reported using most *and* most in need of additional training. These findings held true regardless of the functional areas in which these MBA alumni were working, including marketing/sales, operations/logistics, consulting, general management, finance/accounting, human resources, and information technology/management information systems. Thus, even after completing an MBA, alumni report needing considerably more development of their interpersonal, decision making, generative-thinking (creativity), and managing human capital skills.

The bottom line is that *now* is the time to get serious about management skills. If you want to be both competitive in the marketplace and effective on the job, you must start to master managerial skills today. Importantly, mastering managerial skills should never be to the exclusion of mastering discipline-based technical skills. To be certain, you must become an expert at something. Organizations won't promote people to sales management positions who are not competent salespersons themselves, nor will they promote a staff accountant to an accounting manager role if the person is not a capable accountant. So do not misunderstand: Technical, financial, strategic, and operational skills are of course important elements in job success and career advancement. But a steadily increasing body of research is showing that what ultimately distinguishes the good from the great achievers is the development and refinement of their *management* skills. Thus, the general rule of thumb is as follows: On average, great technical skills get you noticed in organizations and great management skills get you promoted. If you're playing for keeps, now is the time to invest.

## Becoming a Great People-Manager

If managers and good management matter so much, you might wonder why more attention isn't given to such skills and why good management seems more like the exception rather than the rule. Although there are numerous and systemic explanations to these questions, one critical explanation is that learning about managing organizational behavior is fraught with traps and distractions. For example, although there are hundreds of books on leadership, there are

probably less than ten built on a solid foundation of evidence that might be applicable across managerial situations. The problem is, as you stare at the long list of books on Amazon.com, how do you decide which ones to read because they will be helpful and which ones to reject as nothing more than a “good read”? Learning about management first requires a critical understanding about what constitutes strong evidence for a given managerial practice. Every consultant, newspaper article or book on the topic of management uses the phrase, “research shows.” Yet, determining the usefulness of such “research” is one of the most vexing problems facing managers today.

Let’s say you’ve injured your back somehow and you go to a doctor who examines you. She proceeds to write you a prescription about which you ask a very reasonable question, “What is this that you’re prescribing?” She says, “Oh, it’s a great drug that everybody has been using lately.” To which you reply, “Well, what does it do?” “It reduces swelling and spasms in muscle tissues.” “Got it,” you remark, “so my problem is muscle spasms?” “Not sure,” the doctor replies, “but it worked for the last guy who was in here for pain in his ankle.” A bit befuddled now, you ask “Well, has the drug been tested on people with back pain?” She responds, “Not specifically, but I’ve had two patients who responded well to it for back pain—I think it should work for you.”

Before you’re half-way out the door, you are hopefully looking for a new doctor and you’re certainly not taking this drug. It just doesn’t pass the logic smell test. In this case, you should want to know that the doctor has correctly diagnosed your injury, that the drug being prescribed is designed specifically to treat your injury, and that the drug has been tested and studied in large populations to understand its effectiveness and potential side-effects. Put simply, you should be looking for better evidence.

Unfortunately, this little vignette illustrates how we too often go about applying management concepts. First, like the doctor, we are drawn to solutions to problems that we have heard others say “do work.” Yet such evidence is usually built on rather limited data or information, or more commonly on **half-truths**—practices or concepts that may be true some of the time in some instances. Second, we tend to apply solutions broadly, regardless of whether it will specifically address the underlying problem. Third, in the absence of credible information or evidence, we make the assumption that the doctor (or another perceived expert) knows best, even if the recommendations don’t stand up to simple logic.

**Evidence-based management (EBM)** refers to translating principles based on the best available scientific evidence into organizational practices and “making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious” use of such evidence. More specifically, evidence-based management includes the following five key practices:<sup>15</sup>

- 1. Learning about cause and effect connections.** If you’ve ever pondered whether employee job satisfaction is related to employee turnover, you’re engaging in a fundamental EBM practice of trying to understand the relationships among important organizational factors. Like doctors who attempt to link certain life-style choices (for example, a high-fat diet) to health outcomes (for example, heart disease), management researchers study relationships over time and in different settings in order to draw conclusions about effective management practices.
- 2. Isolating variations that affect desired outcomes.** It’s not enough to know that low job satisfaction may increase employee turnover. In order to practice EBM, one must also attempt to understand the specific conditions under which such a relationship might be strengthened or weakened. For example, while job dissatisfaction, on average, may be

associated with increased employee turnover, in economically depressed times, such a relationship may be considerably weakened.

- 3. Reducing the overuse, underuse, and misuse of specific practices.** If the best available evidence suggests that graphology (handwriting analysis), for example, is not a good predictor of who will make a good manager, EBM suggests that it is our obligation to discontinue the use of such a practice in selecting our management talent. If, on the other hand, evidence is clear that cognitive ability tests are useful, we ought to seek ways to increase the use of cognitive ability testing. To be clear, sometimes practices are useful for one situation, but not for another. Thus, EBM holds that effective managers use practices only as solutions to the problems for which they were developed.
- 4. Building decision supports to promote practices that evidence validates.** Once it is known that certain practices work more often than not under certain conditions, EBM suggests that managers institutionalize such practices through the use of tools (or “Tool Kits” as we do throughout the book) to help keep managerial behavior consistent with the evidence.
- 5. Creating a culture of evidence-based decision making and research participation.** When managers take an evidence-based approach, they also contribute to an organization that values and encourages active participation in the evidence-based process. For example, in many manufacturing environments, teams of employees meet weekly to discuss quality control issues. These teams are actively engaged in developing research questions, collecting data, analyzing data and making decisions consistent with the evidence they discover.

So where is the research evidence that can serve as the foundation of effective management practices? In short, organizational behavior is the primary field of study that contributes to the foundation of evidence from which to formulate evidence-based management practices. Specifically, **organizational behavior (OB)** is a social science that attempts to describe, explain, and predict human behavior in an organizational context. As such, organizational behavior scientists are dedicated to studying and ultimately prescribing how individuals, groups, and organizations can be most effective. The key to this definition is that OB represents the study of people in an *organizational context*. In other words, the study of OB is concerned with how to achieve important organizational outcomes such as profitability, productivity, and performance, as well as individual outcomes like employee turnover, commitment, satisfaction, and safety. Organizational behavior certainly does not describe all research on organizations. Indeed, substantial contributions to the study of organizational behavior come from other core social sciences such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science. However, much of what translates into effective managerial practice will be found in the research domain of OB.

## Learning About Organizational Behavior Is Hard

Unfortunately, EBM of organizational behavior is not widely practiced. This is not because people believe it's a bad idea, but rather multiple impediments exist that simply make it difficult. One of the key reasons EBM is not widely practiced is that learning about organizational behavior is not straightforward. Indeed, to become a great manager you will have to learn to become something of a “bull-fighter,” able to sort out the many myths and misconceptions frequently espoused about what is and is not effective management. Managing organizational behavior



absolutely requires you get beyond just reading and study. To really learn and master skills, you will have to actively engage in practice and actually *experience* those skills in your life and work. Certainly, mastering management skills is difficult and the process of learning them can be more challenging than you ever may have imagined. Three key learning challenges are likely to arise that include, but are not limited to: (1) learning how to evaluate and use evidence to make decisions; (2) learning how to use management frameworks; and (3) learning how to overcome the knowing-doing gap so prevalent in management development. We briefly discuss these next.

## Evaluating and Using Evidence

Mark Twain once quipped that there are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics. This aptly describes the dilemma new managers face as they contemplate their most important people-related decisions: namely, differentiating between facts and fictions, especially those cloaked as “research.” The biggest impediment here, however, may not be other people, but rather our own experience. That’s right. It’s your own experience that may get in the way of you becoming a great people manager. One reason for this is that our experience in the world tends to be heavily influenced by our belief system and how we view world events.<sup>16</sup>

That is, your beliefs about the world—or rather what you *want* to believe—may often stand in the way of you applying the best available evidence. For example, most people assume that ibuprofen (used in Advil, Motrin, and other products) is highly effective in reducing pain. Yet, a large study found that the relationship between ibuprofen and pain reduction is incredibly low—almost so low as to have little effect on *most* people (unless of course your pain is associated with tissue inflammation where ibuprofen is most effective). Similarly, most people assume that psychotherapy (that is, psychological counseling) is essentially an ineffective treatment for depression.<sup>17</sup> Here again, our beliefs are not accurate because substantial research shows that psychotherapy can greatly improve people’s well-being. And for most people who have never been in psychotherapy, the way they learn about psychotherapy is through television, movies, and stories. Few competent psychotherapists would agree, however, that movies like *Anger Management*, *What About Bob?*, or TV shows like *The Sopranos* accurately depict the psychotherapeutic process.

For an example closer to home, we routinely ask our students how important grades are to their success on the job. The answer from most is, “not at all.” In other words, students tend to believe that grade point average (GPA) is simply an academic indicator and irrelevant. Yet, recent evidence based on 71 studies suggests that undergraduate GPA is highly correlated with performance on the job in the first year post-college and remains a good predictor of job performance through five years post-college. The graduate school GPA (for example, an MBA) is even more highly correlated with job performance post-graduate school.<sup>18</sup> Even after we present this evidence, students remain in disbelief. “How can this be?” they say. “My brother had a very low GPA in college and is now a star salesperson for an awesome company. Unfortunately, this sort of conclusion based solely on a very small sample and personal experience (what we call a *hasty generalization* in Chapter 4) does not lead to the right conclusion. If you care about your future job performance, the right conclusion based on the evidence is that you should put forth great effort in school. GPA captures a high degree of motivation and knowledge accumulation, both of which are immediately important on the job.

The point is that throughout your career in organizations, you will be confronted with information and observations and existing practices, and not all of it will be good or even accurate. In many cases, our experience in the world often gets in the way of being able to make this determination because we take for

granted relationships we believe exist despite the evidence. It is for this reason that every chapter in this text begins with a discussion on the prevailing myths or conventional wisdom about the topic, with the explicit idea of exposing our “taken for granted” view of the world.

One easy way to begin to understand the usefulness of evidence is to make a distinction between Big E evidence and little e evidence. **Big E evidence** refers to generalizable knowledge regarding cause and effect connections derived from scientific methods. Big E evidence is based upon years of studies, across many different types of samples or contexts, with many different types of jobs, people, and organizations. Most importantly, Big E evidence represents a form of research which is *systematic*—meaning that it is planned and methodical and avoids drawing conclusions simply on the basis of opinion or anecdote. Such evidence is often summarized in large scientific literature reviews or empirical summaries known as meta-analyses or “studies of studies.” Goal setting (see Chapter 7), for instance, is one such idea that has substantial Big E evidence support. Decades of research supports the idea that setting specific and challenging goals increases employee performance, and this finding is highly generalizable (applies broadly to most any situation). By and large, when managing organizational behavior, Big E evidence is likely to be the best source for informing practices since it is drawn from years of study across large populations under varying circumstances. Like our doctor example, this is the type of information you want when asking, “Will this management practice work in my office?”

In contrast, **little e evidence** represents local or organizational specific data collection efforts to inform a specific decision. Popular quality improvement processes such as Six Sigma provide little e evidence; important information that helps the organization but may not generalize or translate into other arenas or other organizations. Examples abound of organizations that failed by trying to apply a practice that while wildly successful in another organization didn’t take hold in their own. Thus, while little e evidence may improve decision making in any organization, we must be careful not to apply it broadly.

### Learning and Using Evidence-Based Frameworks

It is often said that the absence of evidence is not evidence of its absence. In other words, not every problem you will encounter has been studied with such depth that it constitutes Big E or even little e evidence. In such cases, we encourage you to begin by seeking evidence-based *frameworks* that rely on logic and well-developed theory. It may strike you as unusual that, in a skills-oriented book, we do not shy away from discussions of research evidence and theories. In fact, we *sought out* every good research study we could find. That may seem like a direct contradiction of a skills-based approach, but actually it is central to it. Many students these days are unfortunately led to believe that theoretical means irrelevant or not practical or just simply boring. But in reality, to paraphrase the great sociologist Kurt Lewin, nothing is as practical as a good theory. Our goal is to have a practical skills development text based in the best and most recent theory and research. Short of that, any material becomes just someone’s opinion or cannot rightly be generalized to other situations.

Studies in many fields have explored how experts go about attacking particular challenges or problems in practice. What those studies have generally found is that such experts internalize their own “theories in use” or what we call frameworks. That is, they do not have a rote way to act in every situation. However, they do habitually evoke ways of framing problems and considering options. So a great deal of our focus in designing this book was to include frameworks that are conceptually sound but also practical in application. Those frameworks can help you diagnose situations and proceed more thoughtfully. Hopefully, the

frameworks will stick with you and help you know where to start, what information to get, and what not to do as you face new and different situations.

Yet sometimes even the most nicely crafted framework is baseless with respect to evidence and recent research suggests that even when well-intentioned managers seek evidence and frameworks to inform their practice, they face enormous amounts of misinformation—some of which is potentially harmful. For example, researcher Sara Rynes and colleagues examined five years of popular business magazine articles for their representation of three critical managerial topics, namely, (1) personality in the workplace, (2) intelligence, and (3) use of goals.<sup>19</sup> Their results were shocking. Across five years, less than 1 percent of the 537 articles in their sample addressed these topics. More importantly, when they did address them, the authors in those articles did so in ways that disguised the topic so as to appear novel or cutting-edge. Further, few of the articles that addressed the important topics relied on any empirical evidence to substantiate their points. As Rynes and colleagues remarked, their findings showed the overwhelming tendency to:

... focus on claims and testimonials from individuals that were unsupported by any references to empirical evidence. In the absence of such evidence, readers are left completely to their own devices in choosing how to decide among competing claims. Evidence suggests that under such circumstances, people are likely to choose the claims that most closely conform with their prior beliefs. As a result, the odds that anyone will actually learn something new or change his or her behavior as a result of reading such periodicals would seem to be quite small.

If you're surprised by this, keep in mind that those in the business of selling magazines likely feel that discussing issues from an evidence-based perspective doesn't give an article the feeling of freshness or innovation. This pattern of misinformation or lack of attention to the evidence is not unique to business magazines but rather it's endemic to business book publishing in general, where advice is dispensed based upon anecdotal evidence. This general practice led Ed Lawler, a well-respected organizational scholar, to comment that:

A great deal that passes as “best practice” in [management] most likely is not. In some cases, there simply is no evidence to support what is thought to be best practice. In other cases, there is evidence to support that what are thought to be best practices are, in fact, inferior practices. In short, most organizations do not practice evidence-based [management]. As a result, they often underperform with respect to their major stakeholders: employees, investors and the community.

Thus, when someone says “research shows” or the “evidence is clear,” great managers know to dig a little deeper to understand the quality of that evidence. At the end of the day, anecdotes and previous experience may be all that is available to help inform decisions, but in far too many cases anecdotes are used where a rich scientific literature exists to help make better decisions.

## Overcoming the Knowing-Doing Gap

For most management skills, the conceptual rules are relatively easy to know and understand. Most 12-year-olds could be taught to pass a test on the general rules or guidelines of the skills that comprise great management. The real challenge is to actually execute them. For example, listing the rules of effective behavior in a team is relatively easy. However, actually joining a team in a competitive business situation and contributing in a way that adds real value to that team is an entirely different matter. Similarly, the fundamental elements of models of motivation are elementary. But trying to create a culture that motivates peoples' best efforts is extraordinarily complex.

We chose the subtitle of this book—*What Great Managers Know and Do*—because it takes both knowledge (“know *that*”) and application practice (“know

*how*”) to master a skill. Successful application of management skills is more than just following a cookbook list of sequential behaviors and is much more complicated than developing skills such as those associated with a trade (say, welding) or a sport (hitting a golf ball). That is because management skills are (1) linked to a more complex knowledge base than other types of skills and (2) are inherently connected to interaction with other (frequently unpredictable) people. A standardized approach to welding or hitting golf balls or baking a cake may be feasible, but a standardized approach to managing human beings is not possible.<sup>20</sup>

Nonetheless, one of the most encouraging elements of management skills is that they *can* be improved—we have seen it happen countless times. You do not, however, master the skills simply via hope, intuition, or common sense. Rather, it requires conscious persistent effort and practice. At the same time, practice without the necessary conceptual foundation is misguided and ignores the need for flexibility and adaptation to different situations. In short, any serious attempt to develop management skills must involve a dose of both conceptual learning and behavioral practice. It requires intentional study and a skill-oriented and problem-based approach.<sup>21</sup>

So one of the key questions that students studying organizational behavior must confront is whether or not investing time, money, energy, or any other resource in developing the skills associated with good management is really worth the effort. You might rightly ask yourself, “given my limited resources, would I be better off perfecting my coding skills or should I invest in learning how to run a team?” “Should I take an extra finance course in preparation for the CFP exam or should I spend time running a club?” The answer quite simply is, “yes.” Yes, you should hone your technical skills, and yes, you should start now (while the stakes are rather low) to seek every opportunity to practice managing organizational behavior. In the remaining sections of this chapter, we discuss the process of learning how to learn about yourself and managing organizational behavior.



## MANAGEMENT LIVE 1.3

### Knowing vs. Doing: The Disturbing State of Applied Management Effectiveness<sup>22</sup>

A wealth of anecdotal data suggests that, despite sufficient book knowledge of what constitutes effective management practice, managers may often lack the ability to apply that knowledge in *context*—and a recent comprehensive research report supports those suspicions. The authors used a management assessment known as the MSAT (Management Skills Assessment Test) to measure the applied management capability of over 20,000 managers, or aspiring managers, over the past 25 years. The MSAT consists of eight common fundamental management scenarios (for example, delegating jobs, dealing with a low-performing employee, managing conflict) presented on an electronic interface via an Internet web browser. For each of the eight items in the MSAT, candidates must respond by: (1) identifying the important issues, (2) describing the actions they would take to be most effective, and (3) actually taking those actions (writing memos, follow-up notes, and so on) where appropriate. That means that they have to be able to execute the action and also know *when* to do so and *why* they chose to do so—all without any cues or prompts.

The results leave little question that there is, in fact, a substantive knowing-doing gap in management practice. More specifically, despite relatively high scores on cognitive aptitude and multiple-choice tests of management principles, the MSAT test-takers generally failed to reach even the midpoint scores of the assessed items. There was considerable variance and some candidates scored very high, but the disturbingly low level of the average scores points to the critical importance of a focus on skill application and decision making in management education—and the pressing need to get beyond just the conceptual knowledge of principles.

## Learning and Personal Improvement

### Personal Effectiveness: The Foundation of Great Management

DO 1-2

Effective management starts from the inside. Indeed, when people are asked to describe great managers, it is remarkable how often they give personal, rather than interpersonal or organizational, descriptions. Put simply, those who can manage themselves are much more likely to be effective managers of others. Personal effectiveness is the foundation of great management, and the skills presented in the following chapters all stem from a base of personal excellence. Although many elements comprise personal effectiveness, our focus is on *actionable* knowledge and behaviors—things you can actively learn and do to improve your personal competence. No one is born a great manager, nor becomes one overnight. So the most fundamental aspect of personal competence is to know yourself and to have a clear understanding of how you learn new skills and motivate yourself to improve your capability.

*Hope is not a personal improvement strategy.*

—Anonymous

We start with models of learning and self-management. Great management is often as much about not acting on misconceptions, and avoiding what not to do, as it is about expertly pursuing a course of action.<sup>23</sup> With that in mind, the Myths 1.1 box contains five of the more persistent myths of personal effectiveness.

#### ? MYTHS 1.1

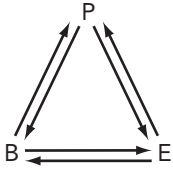
#### Myths of Personal Effectiveness

- **Management learning comes with age and experience.** Unfortunately, that simply is not true. Learning is hard work and comes from a conscious and persistent desire to attend to effective models, learn and retain what they do, and practice new behaviors consistently.
- **We know ourselves.** In fact, a number of revealing research studies have shown that the gap between how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us is often significant. These gaps, many of which we are blind to, frequently lead to management problems or failure.<sup>24</sup> True self-awareness is the foundation of personal effectiveness.
- **Growth opportunities lie solely in our weaknesses.** We succeed because of what we do well. However, it is common to become so focused on improving our weak areas and gaps that we neglect our strengths. Personal development of new skills is important, but you should also spend time clarifying what it is you do well and then try to position yourself in situations where you can leverage your strengths to excel.
- **Personal development is all just about positive thinking.** With the appeal of popular books like *The Secret*, people may believe that being optimistic is all there is to development. Just wish it and it will become true! While an optimistic outlook does have a number of benefits, you will not become a skilled manager by just wishing it. Becoming a skilled manager takes practice, dedication, and rational optimism.
- **It's not me, it's them!** If you learn one management "truth" it should be this: You can never fully control the behavior of others, but you *do* have control over your own behavior. The best way to change others is to first change *yourself*.



*The will to win is vastly overrated as a means of doing so. What is more important is the will to practice and the means to execute.*

—Bob Knight, Basketball Hall of Fame Coach



**FIGURE 1.2**  
**Social Learning Theory**

*Personal factors* include a person's internal mental processes such as motivation, attention, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. *Behavior* is the person's response or action. *Environment* includes the physical and social environment surrounding an individual. It includes reinforcement and punishment contingencies and models.

*In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. But, in practice, there is.*

—Jan L. A. van de Snepscheut

## Learning How to Learn

Much has been written about the high failure rates of people trying to learn and change. For example, a tiny percentage of people actually keep their New Year's resolutions. The vast majority of people who set out to “get in shape” are back to being overweight in a couple of months. Most of those who say, “This is the year I am going to get organized,” find that it ultimately was, in fact, not the year. The problem with most personal improvement attempts is they are mostly wishful thinking with far too little understanding of how personal improvement really happens. That is, most everyone *hopes* to improve, or *wishes* they could enhance their effectiveness. However, far too few actually know and discipline themselves to do what is necessary to learn new skills.

The most powerful and useful framework for thinking about personal improvement in management skills comes from the work of Albert Bandura, and his **social learning theory**.<sup>25</sup> Bandura's theory suggests that the learning of any new behavior is the result of three main factors—the person, the environment, and the behavior—and they all influence each other. Behavior is not simply the result of the environment and the person, just as the environment is not simply the result of the person and the behavior. This mutual influence is referred to as **reciprocal determinism** and is at the root of social learning theory. This is because the environment provides important models of behavior from which we learn. A model of social learning theory can be seen in Figure 1.2.

*Personal factors* include a person's internal mental processes such as motivation, attention, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. *Behavior* is the person's response or action. *Environment* includes the physical and social environment surrounding an individual. It includes reinforcement and punishment contingencies and models.

Although this concept may sound a little abstract, the principles of social learning theory are exceptionally practical and have been applied to help foster personal change in a wide variety of settings including but not limited to counseling, acting, addictive behaviors, and athletics. One reason social learning has been so influential is because it refutes widely held notions that people only learn through their own personal experience of rewards and consequences. For example, traditional conceptions of learning suggest you would learn that a stove burns you only by *actually touching* that stove yourself. Bandura suggests that, in fact, most learning is actually done through observation and **modeling** of the behaviors of others. That is, most people learn the stove burns by watching the behavior of others (perhaps seeing them burned or actively avoiding it). This simple phenomenon helps explain why so many people who work for ineffective managers often become poor managers themselves; we often manage the way in which we were managed.

A second reason social learning notions are particularly appropriate for management skills is because there is such a big disconnect between knowing and doing. For most management skills, the conceptual rules are relatively easy to know and understand. Most teenagers could be taught to pass a test on the general rules or guidelines of the skills that comprise great management. But the real challenge is to actually execute them.

Fortunately, one of the most encouraging elements of management skills is that it is possible to improve your execution of such skills—but not simply via intuition or common sense. Rather, improvement requires conscious persistent effort and practice. Bandura outlines four critical components required to learn through observation, and these are the key building blocks of the most successful management training methods used in organizations today.<sup>26</sup> These components are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

 MANAGEMENT LIVE 1.4

## Where Does Talent Really Come From?

Some fascinating findings are emerging from a group of researchers trying to answer an important and age-old question: When someone is very good at doing something, what is it that actually makes him or her good? This stream of research work, led by Anders Ericsson, Conradi Eminent Scholar and Professor of Psychology at Florida State University, is collectively known as the Expert Performance Movement. Ericsson's first experiment, nearly 30 years ago, involved memory—training a person to hear and then repeat a random series of numbers.

Ericsson's study refuted the commonly held notion that cognitive skills, particularly those like memory, are mostly genetically determined (for example, "he was born with a photographic memory"). As he notes, "With the first subject, after about 20 hours of training, his digit span had risen from 7 to 20. He just kept improving, and after about 200 hours of training he had risen to over 80 numbers."

Based on that and later research showing memory is *not* genetically determined, Ericsson concludes that the act of memorizing is more a function of dedicated commitment and practice than a genetic gift. In other words, whatever innate differences two people may exhibit in their abilities, those differences are overwhelmed by how well each person has engaged in *deliberate practice*. Deliberate practice is not just simply repeating a task—playing a C-minor scale 100 times, for instance, or hitting tennis serves until your shoulder pops out of its socket. Rather, it involves setting specific goals, obtaining immediate feedback, and concentrating as much on technique as on outcome.

Ericsson and his colleagues have since taken to studying expert performers in a wide range of pursuits, including soccer, golf, surgery, piano playing, Scrabble, writing, chess, software design, stock picking, and darts. Based on that work, they made the startling assertion that the trait we commonly call talent is important but generally *overrated*.

Ericsson's research further suggests that when it comes to choosing a life path, you should do what you love—because if you don't love it, you are unlikely to work hard enough to get very good. Most people naturally don't like to do things they aren't "good" at. So they often give up, telling themselves they simply don't possess the talent for math or skiing or the violin. But what they really lack is the desire to be good and to undertake the deliberate practice that would make them better.

Source: Adapted from Dubner, S. J., and S. D. Levitt. (2006, May 7). "A Star Is Made." *New York Times Magazine*, p. 24.

**Attention.** Not too surprisingly, if you want to learn anything, you have to pay specific **attention**. Thus, the first challenge of learning is to focus. Anything that puts a damper on attention will decrease your learning comprehension. If you are unfocused, nervous, or distracted by other things, you will not learn as well. Thus, a critical step in learning new skills is to find the right models and devote undivided attention to them. If you do not make what you want to learn a top priority and give the subject ample attention, you are unlikely to succeed.

In addition, it is critical you isolate as specifically as possible the behaviors you hope to learn. This approach may seem like common sense, but it is frequently violated. Many try to learn too much or change too many things at once. An example from basketball would be to repeatedly watch a successful player's form while shooting foul shots rather than trying to learn to shoot foul shots from watching an entire basketball game. In a management context, it would be better to isolate the nonverbal motions of an effective speaker than to attempt to emulate the speakers in a debate.

**Retention.** You must be able to understand and remember what you have observed. Coding what we observe into words, labels, or images results in better

retention than simply observing. If you can relate your observations to a theory or framework, and understand *why* what you observed was effective or ineffective, you have a better chance of retrieving it when you need it. This is where the study of written models and frameworks can be most useful. That is, just observing an effective speech, decision process, or team meeting is a good start. But real learning—the kind you can ultimately transfer to your own situations—comes from understanding the underlying principles that made the behaviors effective and being able to recall and translate those principles when appropriate.

**Reproduction.** Perhaps the most critical contribution of social learning theory to developing management skills is it highlights the importance of practice, or actual demonstration, of a skill. That is, you cannot learn management by just observing, reading, or understanding the concept. Rather, you have to translate the images or descriptions into actual behavior. Research shows that our abilities improve even when we just imagine ourselves performing!<sup>27</sup> Many athletes, for example, imagine their performance in their mind's eye prior to actually competing. However, the more we can actually reproduce the skill we aim to learn, in the actual context where the skill will be applied, the more likely we are to add that skill to our repertoire.

Another critical point with respect to reproduction is that the saying “practice makes perfect” is only a half-truth. “Practice with *feedback* makes perfect” or at least enables people to learn. Feedback is essential for learning or developing any kind of skill. This is one of the reasons why video games are so satisfying for people to play. They provide an opportunity to reproduce the behavior (that is, play the game) with immediate feedback (your score).

**Motivation.** Finally, even with careful attention, retention, reproduction, and feedback, you still won't successfully acquire a new skill unless you are motivated to persist and stay with it. Without some conscious reason to keep up the effort required to learn a new skill, or change a habit, you are doomed to fail. Your motivation may derive from past reinforcement, promised reinforcements (incentives) that you can imagine, or vicarious reinforcement—seeing and recalling the models you observe being reinforced. Of course, you may also use punishments for *failure* to achieve your learning goals. However, Bandura has found that punishment does not work as well as reinforcement and, in fact, has a tendency to backfire on us.

Bandura's principles may seem intuitive to most of us, but observational learning is neither easy nor self-evident. If it were easy to just observe and mimic the effective behavior of others, many more people would be successful in improving themselves. Rather, it takes disciplined self-management to apply the principles Bandura has proposed. In Table 1.2, we present a common example of breakdowns in learning, using the example of improving interviewing skills.

## A Model of Self-Management

Using Bandura's work as a base, Charles Manz and his colleagues have created a simple and practical framework for self-management.<sup>28</sup> They define **self-management** as a process of modifying one's own behavior by systematically altering how we arrange different cues in our world, how we think about what we hope to change, and how we attach behavioral consequences to our actions. The framework takes into account that personal change is rarely a discrete, single event but rather a process with multiple influences. The underlying theme is that we all have the ability to change our immediate worlds in ways that will help us learn new things and behave in desirable ways.

*The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.*

—Walt Disney

*Nothing will work unless you do.*

—Maya Angelou

**TABLE 1.2** What's Keeping Max from Learning to Interview Better?

Max, who is soon graduating from college, has a strong record of achievement (high grades and a good extracurricular profile) but is struggling with the recruiting process. After several interviews, he has failed to make it to the next round a single time, and feeling discouraged, he has asked some of his interviewers for comments. The three who were willing to respond all essentially said he did not “interview well.” As a result, Max hopes to improve his interviewing skills. Overlaying the principles of social learning and self-management can help illuminate Max’s challenge and common traps that occur.

**Attention.** Max needs to address at least two issues to be consistent with effective social learning. First, he needs to set aside time to practice his interviewing skills in the midst of many competing time demands. He is likely to feel his classes, part-time job, and social life take precedence and thus may well not devote enough time to improving his interviewing skills—a classic case where hoping will supersede a real learning strategy.

Second, Max needs to understand more specifically what he is doing or *not doing* in his interviews that is leading to poor outcomes. Without some specific understanding of his weaknesses (and relative strengths), he is destined to flounder in trying to determine how to improve. Unfortunately, that information may well be hard to come by in this case and he may need some mock interviews to tease it out.

**Retention.** Max needs to build an understanding of what makes for an impressive interview performance. Learning how to illustrate his background and accomplishments using the STAR model outlined in Chapter 12 would likely be a good step.

Max would also benefit from observing models with *recognizable excellence* in what he is trying to improve. In these cases, we often see people make the mistake of attempting to learn from friends or relying on anecdotal evidence from well-intentioned, but non-expert, sources.

**Reproduction.** Max needs practice accompanied by feedback on that practice. Practice should be treated like an actual interview. The more elements Max can re-create, the better his learning will be. A great deal of time needs to be dedicated to rehearsal, feedback, and more rehearsal. Mock interviews would seem to be essential here but are often awkward or difficult to arrange and therefore are not utilized.

**Motivation.** Max needs to decide how important improving his interview skills are to him and if he is willing to dedicate the time to changing. He needs the discipline to avoid taking shortcuts and saying “good enough” to really make a long-term lasting change. He should find ways to reinforce himself for devoting the time and should certainly celebrate any success on the interview front.

The framework provides a means of avoiding some of the most common “hope vs. action” traps and of putting Bandura’s principles into practice. It includes strategies we directly impose on ourselves to influence our own behavior and those whereby we attempt to alter our external world to help affect our behavioral change. While Manz and colleagues have presented their model in a variety of ways and with different labels (for example, self-management, self-leadership, super leadership),<sup>29</sup> we have condensed it here to the five essential elements most effective in facilitating personal improvement (see Tool Kit 1.1).

Note that this self-management framework has been successfully applied in many different contexts, including drug therapy, weight loss, health care, theater, and athletics. For example, all successful golf training is based on the elements of this framework. As you progress further in this book, you will see that



## PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS TOOL KITS

### Tool Kit 1.1 Five Behavior-Focused Strategies to Improve Self-Management<sup>30</sup>

1. **Self-Observation/Exploration:** Observe and collect information about the specific behaviors you have targeted for change.
2. **Self-Set Goals:** Determine what more effective behavior is (often by observing effective models) and set specific goals for your own behaviors.
3. **Management of Cues:** Organize your work environment to assist you in performing the behaviors you want to change.
4. **Positive Self-Talk and Rehearsal:** Go over the behavior in your head and imagine its successful application. Actually practice the new behavior at available opportunities and seek feedback.
5. **Self-Reward and Punishment:** Provide yourself with personally valued rewards that are linked to performing desirable behaviors or with punishments linked to undesirable behaviors.

the effective behaviors of self-management are also entirely consistent with what great managers do when it comes to coaching and motivating *others*. This should not be surprising because, as we noted earlier, effective people managers are first successful in managing themselves.

#### Self-Observation/Exploration

You can't induce or recognize a change in behavior until you have some information about what you currently are doing. **Self-observation** involves determining when, why, and under what conditions you currently use certain behaviors. For example, if your personal improvement challenge is to improve your grades via more focused study time, it is important to ask when and where you find you study best now. How many hours are you currently devoting to each subject? Which courses are you doing the best in? And so on.

Self-observations provide the building blocks for managing ourselves. The best self-observation strategies involve actually recording your observations and keeping close tabs on your behavior, both before you begin changes and after. This recording can be as simple as counting how many minutes you are late to meetings, to more complex diaries of your behavior. Learning a new skill or habit often requires that we also change or *unlearn* other dysfunctional habits, adding significantly to the challenge.

In that vein, a critical aspect of self-observation is to learn from mistakes or failed efforts. While we all have a tendency to be defensive, look to blame others, or ignore failure, viewing mistakes as learning opportunities builds a foundation for further learning. Mistakes can prompt us to look inward and evaluate our limitations and shortcomings. Mistakes are only problems if you repeat them or do not learn from them. Indeed, if you are not making mistakes, it is worth asking whether you are stretching yourself in your job and taking any developmental risks. Great managers make a lot of mistakes, but those mistakes are seen as “productive failures” and are rarely made twice.<sup>31</sup>

#### Self-Set Improvement Goals

The first task of setting goals is to determine what your desired outcome or effective behaviors look like. The best goals often derive from attention to effective models. Some of the things that influence our attention involve characteristics of

*Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.*

—James Baldwin

*If you're not making mistakes, then you're not doing anything. I'm positive that a doer makes mistakes.*

—John Wooden



the model or learning stimuli. As a result, we are more likely to adopt a modeled behavior if the model is similar to the observer (more like us), has admired status, and if the behavior has functional value (gets us something we want). Thus, if the model is attractive or prestigious or appears to be particularly competent, we pay more attention.

An example of this can be seen in thinking about how to effectively study for a class. One tactic for this challenge would be to observe the study habits of highly successful students to see if you might emulate some of their behaviors. Self-set goals need to address long-range pursuits and short-run objectives along the way. The shorter-range goals should be consistent with the long-range goals for maximum consistency. The process takes effort, and although our goals are likely to change, it is important we try to have current goals for our immediate efforts. Goal setting is so fundamental to great management that we reinforce it throughout this book.

Studies have shown that goal setting works because:

1. In committing to a goal, a person devotes attention toward goal-relevant activities and away from goal-irrelevant activities.
2. Goals energize people. Challenging goals lead to higher effort than easy goals.
3. Goals affect persistence. High goals prolong effort, and tight deadlines lead to more rapid work pace than loose deadlines.
4. Goals motivate people to use their knowledge to help them attain the goal and to discover the knowledge needed to obtain it.<sup>32</sup>

The best goals are characterized by the acronym **SMART**, which represents specific, measurable, attainable/accepted, relevant, and time-bound. SMART goals make for smarter learners.<sup>33</sup>

## Management of Cues

Taking your lead from your self-observations and goals, you can begin to modify your environment. The objective is to organize your world to assist you in performing the behaviors you want to change. For example, if you are trying to quit smoking and improve your health, put away the ashtrays, drink tea instead of coffee, and take the ice cream out of the freezer and replace it with low-fat substitutes. If you are trying to study more on Thursday nights, get out of the apartment when everyone is heading to social engagements (and enticing you to come along), and go to the library or some quiet spot.

A related strategy is to create reminders and attention focusers you will notice and act on. A sticky note on the refrigerator reminding you of your weight loss goal, or a screensaver or text message to yourself about a forthcoming test, can provide a cue that will help you focus on an important improvement objective.

## Positive Self-Talk and Rehearsal

Positive self-talk and rehearsal are applications of the social learning principle of *reproduction*. Search for opportunities to practice new behavior in the most realistic situations you can find. Basketball players know that just shooting 100 free throws will not simulate the pressure of shooting one at the end of a close game. So the best shooters find ways to practice under conditions that mirror those pressurized conditions (for example, team running for missed free throws, everyone lined up around the key trying to distract the shooter, simulated crowd noise). Some people treat their jobs as games (like salespeople) by trying out new techniques and seeing how well they work. Whatever the context, you must practice and rehearse any new skill for it to ultimately become part of your repertoire.

*"One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try."*

—Sophocles

*Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you are right.*

—Henry Ford

Further, the use of **positive self-talk** is extremely important. If you have ever repeatedly said to yourself, “I know I can do this,” before attempting a difficult task, you were practicing a proven technique of self-management. The idea is to create a frame of mind that energizes your self-confidence and gets you beyond self-defeating and negative feelings that can accompany learning difficult tasks. Just as managers and coaches work on team morale and motivation, individuals can affect their behavior by getting “pumped up” and self-motivated.

### Self-Reward and Punishment

Although no manager would deny the importance of **reward** and **punishment** for influencing employee behavior, the concept is strangely neglected when we think of ourselves. The truth is we can profoundly induce our actions by rewarding ourselves for desirable behavior. For example, “I will go out to dinner on Saturday night if I accomplish my goal. I will do paperwork instead if I do not.” You simply arrange to reward yourself when you adhere to your plan and possibly punish yourself when you do not.

Generally speaking, it is better to use self-reward than self-punishment. Celebrate your victories and don't dwell on your failures. A great deal of learning research has found that punishment does not work as well as reinforcement.<sup>34</sup> However, there may be times when the most powerful or immediate incentive for you may be a punishment, and in such cases it may make an appropriate disincentive. Do not, however, punish yourself for slips or lapses. Changing habits and learning new things is never a straight path, and as the Tool Kit on relapse prevention at the end of this chapter illustrates, expecting and preparing for those inevitable lapses will be more fruitful.<sup>35</sup>

### Putting It All into Practice

The self-management model represents the best methodology currently available for facilitating personal improvement. The basic notions are simple. To really get beyond mere hope and make a sustainable personal improvement requires you to:

1. Know where you are currently.
2. Set SMART goals for your change.
3. Arrange your world so it focuses your attention and reminds you of your improvement plan and goals.
4. Stay positive and rehearse the desired behaviors at every opportunity.
5. Create your own rewards for accomplishing your targets.

Since many of us already use some of these strategies, and they seem simple enough, why are most people not more effective at self-management? It is mostly because we often use them either ineffectively, or inconsistently. That is, the piecemeal use of these strategies tends to make them relatively ineffective. Thinking through your own experiences, consider how often you see (or practice) one of these strategies in isolation, but how rarely you see them together.

For instance, many people have started down a path of weight loss by setting a goal and monitoring their eating behavior—a good start. But more often than not, they do not consistently manage their cues, practice new habits of grocery shopping and ordering while dining out, or create reinforcements powerful enough to sustain their efforts. So they start well, with much hope, but do not have the strategies in place to persist until they have succeeded. Engaging in one strategy, while not engaging in the others, is much like ordering a Diet Coke to go with a big greasy cheeseburger and super-sized fries. It may be better than having a milk shake, but it is really not helping someone lose weight.

*We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.*

—Jesse Owens, Olympic Gold Medalist

We suspect that much here has validated what you already knew and are doing to some extent. Hopefully, though, it can make it easier to more systematically go about learning and managing yourself in an increasingly complex world.

## Building Self-Awareness

### Self-Awareness: The Key to Successful Learning and Growth

DO 1-4

DO 1-5

The models of learning and self-management described earlier point to the critical importance of self-awareness. Self-awareness is mission critical for those attempting to accelerate their managerial learning and to become more personally effective. The best managers not only consistently seek feedback to know themselves better and what areas they need to improve, but also isolate their personal strengths and preferences so they can best position themselves for success. Self-awareness is essential to learning and growth in a management role because it forms the basis by which we learn about ourselves and how we differ from others.

### Individual Differences and Their Importance

There is perhaps no more obvious yet curiously neglected truth than “people are different.” Recognizing our own differences is important because they impact how we react and behave in different situations.

Every popular magazine these days seems to include some sort of self-assessment of an intriguing individual difference. Headlines claim you can learn some hidden truth about yourself by answering a few questions and then scoring yourself with the provided scoring guide. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ*, and *Vogue* regularly have some sort of “self-assessment” that sounds like it will be helpful, but they are rarely what they appear to be. But since your “cool quotient,” “hottie index,” or “marriage potential” are not of great concern in managerial environments (at least hopefully not), what, specifically, should the self-aware manager know?

Of course, people differ in an infinite number of ways. From a managerial performance perspective, however, the two important categories of difference are: (1) ability and (2) personality (which includes values and motives).<sup>36</sup> **Ability** can be simply defined as what a person is capable of doing.<sup>37</sup> This “capacity to do” leads some people to be able to dunk a basketball, calculate complex math in their heads, or interpret abstract patterns very quickly. Abilities come in many dimensions and include **cognitive ability**, physical ability, and emotional ability (now often referred to as **emotional intelligence** and an area of study in which there’s been a recent explosion of interest).

**Personality** represents the pattern of relatively enduring ways in which a person thinks, acts, and behaves.<sup>38</sup> Personality is determined both by nature (genetics) and nurture (situational factors) and tends to represent our “dominant” or “natural” behavior. While it may be appealing to think about it in these terms, there is not a “good” or “bad” personality profile. Although some personality characteristics have been associated more frequently with some occupations and interests, no personality combination limits you from types of occupations you might enjoy or determines your destiny.

How you behave at any given time is an interaction of your personality and your environment. This interaction accounts for why we often behave differently at home than we might at work or school. For example, your dominant

*Success in the new economy comes to those who know themselves—their strengths, their values, and how they best perform.*

—Peter Drucker

personality trait may be one of **introversion**, yet in order to perform well on your job you have to “turn it on” to talk with clients and customers—that is, demonstrate **extraversion**. Sometimes the situation or environment has much more to do with how we behave than does our personality. It is a fundamental error to assume that behavior is solely a function of one’s personality since the environment will always play a role as well.

Assessment of managerial ability and personality has become increasingly popular in both organizational and educational contexts. It can be intriguing, even fun, to see where we stand on different scales (for example, who would not be curious about your own “love quotient”?), and some form of assessment is essential if we are to clarify our own abilities, personality traits, values, and preferences. However, our experience suggests assessments are most useful when an individual has a defined *need to know*. Put another way, the most fruitful assessment process is ideally a research project where *you* are the focus of the research.

With that in mind, we sought to identify the set of fundamental personal questions most important to managerial and interpersonal self-awareness, and to identify assessment tools that can help you begin your personal inquiry into those questions. We boldly call our seven elements of self-awareness the Essential Managerial Assessment Profile. Other aspects of self-awareness (for example, learning style, tolerance of ambiguity, conflict style, leadership behavior) are relevant and important, and we include measures of some in your instructor’s supplemental materials. If you become more self-aware on these seven aspects in an informed and thoughtful way, you will have a firm baseline of self-knowledge.

Ultimately, we want you to be able to answer the question “Tell me about yourself” in a way that will have meaning and relevance to those you might work with or manage. The goal is not simply to describe your favorite characteristics, but to know how your abilities and personality may impact your behavior and performance. Table 1.3 categorizes and defines the seven dimensions, identifies leading assessment tools associated with each dimension, and briefly highlights the positive implications of higher self-knowledge on each dimension. Today, there are many online resources for taking self-assessments and getting feedback and developmental recommendations. The appendix to this text and your instructor should help you identify appropriate self-assessments for your personal performance.

### Important Self-Awareness Issues

As you embark on a journey toward greater self-awareness, you should also take into account several important points regarding the interpretation of assessments. First, assessment results are simply feedback. As we’ve stated before, these results are not the absolute or final truth, nor do they dictate your destiny. Abilities (sometimes called talents) are only valuable when they are applied and manifested as skills or behaviors. The world is full of high-ability folks who do not succeed; athletic coaches often refer to such people as “wasted talent.” Similarly, just *having* certain personality characteristics is less important than how you attempt to put yourself in positions where those traits are most valued and rewarded.

Second, as we noted earlier, literally thousands of self-assessments exist but many have questionable legitimacy. So look for measures that have an established norm base (significant data reporting from prior assessments) and have stood the test of time. The example assessments included in your essentials profile are all well established with a base of research evidence related to their outcomes and relevance for managerial contexts.

Third, preferences are choices we make about how we perceive the world and function best in it. Some of these “choices” are not necessarily conscious ones but rather modes of behaving that seem most natural for us. If you’ve ever done any acting, you know that attempting to “be someone you’re not” is not easy and

All facts are friendly.

—Unknown

TABLE 1.3 The Essential Managerial Assessment Profile

Self-Awareness Dimension	Ability, Personality, or Preference?	Examples of Commonly Used Assessment Tools	Implication
Cognitive Ability (critical and analytical thinking)	<b>Ability</b> to recognize quantitative and verbal patterns quickly and accurately. Includes the ability to acquire knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Test</li> <li>• Wonderlic Personnel Test</li> </ul>	Is cognitive ability a strength or an area to supplement with the help of others? What types of jobs and industries suit my analytical ability?
Emotional Intelligence?	<b>Ability</b> to accurately recognize and understand emotions in others and self and to use emotional information productively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MSCEIT</li> </ul>	Do I understand and use emotion to make effective decisions? Can I relate to people well because I appropriately read their emotional states?
Cultural Intelligence	<b>Ability</b> to function effectively in the context of differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Quotient Scale (CQS)</li> </ul>	Am I aware of important cultural differences? Do I understand and act in ways that will value those differences and create stronger relationships?
Personality Traits	Primary <b>personality</b> characteristics that remain relatively stable over one's life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Big Five Inventory</li> </ul>	What are my dominant personality traits? How do I maximize my fit to best utilize my personality?
Personality Preferences (temperament)	<b>Preference</b> for direction of energy decision-making, information acquisition, and orientation to the outer world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myers-Briggs Type Indicator</li> </ul>	How do I like to work with others and process information? What do I look for in others to complement my preferences? How will I best interact in different team combinations?
Personal Values	<b>Preference</b> for desirable ends or goals and the process for attaining them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rokeach Values Checklist</li> <li>• Hogan MPV Scale</li> </ul>	What do I value most and seek in others? What will I not bend or compromise on? What to me is non-negotiable?
Career Orientation	<b>Preference</b> for particular types of work environments and occupations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holland Occupational Preference Scale</li> </ul>	What occupational elements are most important to me? With what types of people will I thrive?



requires a great degree of attention, direction, and energy. Our personal characteristics such as core values, interpersonal preferences, and career orientations are those with which we feel most comfortable and natural. You can choose to behave outside your preferences, but it will require a significantly higher level of your conscious energy to do so.

Finally, we always recommend you look for patterns and consistency across your assessments. When you find consistency, it is evidence of a more dominant trait or preference. Inconsistency suggests a less-defined characteristic. Perhaps most importantly, you should always interpret your self-assessments in the context of other feedback you've received and not dwell on assessed weaknesses or limitations. We elaborate on those two issues next.

### Involve Others: Seek Regular Feedback

Although the evidence is compelling that feedback-seeking behavior and increases in self-awareness are associated with positive outcomes like job satisfaction and performance,<sup>39</sup> many young managers do not actively pursue greater self-awareness. Why is that so?

A useful analogy for this curious reluctance can be found in the field of medicine. Many illnesses could be cured and diseases halted, if only people were not afraid to get a checkup—but they are often too scared to find out if anything is wrong. The same holds for seeking interpersonal and management feedback. We all want to protect, maintain, and enhance our self-concepts and the impressions we think others hold of us. And we often have fears and inadequacies (for example, I hate speaking to groups; I can't handle conflict; I look awkward on camera) that we would prefer not to focus on or reveal even to ourselves.

Reliable knowledge about ourselves can help us gain insights into what areas we want to change and improve, and even more importantly, the strengths we should aim to utilize more in our work and relationships. Always keep in mind your perception of yourself is likely to differ from others',<sup>40</sup> and some folks we typically turn to (for instance, our mothers) are not always likely to be entirely truthful with us.

Simply put, the major obstacle to seeking feedback is fear. So the first and most important step toward developing self-awareness is a willingness to put aside that natural fear and push beyond our comfort zone in learning things about ourselves. However, a critically important point is that it is virtually impossible to dramatically increase self-awareness unless we interact with and disclose ourselves to others. That is, while self-assessments are a good first step, no amount of self-examination is enough to really know yourself. You can analyze yourself for weeks, or meditate for months, and you will not fully know yourself, any more than you can tickle yourself or smell your own breath.

The reason it is so important to get beyond yourself is that we are just not very good judges of our own behavior and ability. There are many ways in which other people know us better than we know ourselves, particularly when it comes to how adept we are in our relationships. **Multisource feedback** (that is, feedback provided by many sources other than yourself, such as a boss, co-worker, customer, and subordinate) enhances self-knowledge and consequently improves managerial behavior.<sup>41</sup> In fact, research has found that higher levels of agreement between managerial "self" and "other" behavioral ratings are associated with managerial effectiveness and performance.<sup>42</sup>

In short, the ideal evaluation relies not on any one source but on multiple perspectives. These may include self-reports as well as peer, boss, and subordinate feedback. Feedback from multiple sources can be a powerful source of data for highlighting your strengths and targeting the competencies that need to improve. Multiple perspectives on yourself are extremely powerful ways to build self-awareness and get you ready to embark on personal improvement.

*We would rather be ruined by  
praise than saved by critique.*

—Norman Vincent Peale



## PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS TOOL KITS

### Tool Kit 1.2 Personal Quality Checklist<sup>43</sup>

Building on the principles of organizational quality improvement efforts, Bernie Sergesteketter and Harry Roberts have devised a tool for self-management called the personal quality checklist (PQC). Using their approach, you define desirable standards of personal behavior and performance and then keep track of failures or “defects” to meet those standards. The specific steps to the approach are:

1. **Draw up a checklist of standards.** This is the hardest part. Two samples are included at the end of this Tool Kit as illustrations (one by a practicing manager and one from a college student). Each standard should have a clear relationship to a “customer” either in the workplace or in your family or circle of friends. Each standard has to be unambiguously defined so you can recognize and tally a defect when it occurs. Thus, “get in shape” is not a good standard. A better standard would be to “break a sweat every day.”

There are two broad types of standards: (1) waste reducers / time savers (for example, be on time to class or group meetings), and (2) activity expanders (call parents at least once a week, get résumé completed). If you include all activity expanders on your list, be sure you have enough waste reducers and time savers to create free time for them.

2. **Tally your daily defects.** Defects should be tallied by days but can ultimately be aggregated by weeks or months. One intriguing strategy is to let others help you keep score. For example, if a checklist standard is to talk to your spouse only in respectful tones, or spend at least a half hour with your daughter each day, then your spouse or daughter may well be the best tally keeper for those standards.
3. **Review your tallies and action plan.** Some people find the word “defect” objectionable, but it is key to the system. First, it is easy to recognize and tally. Moreover, defects can become your friends because they suggest opportunities for improvement. Why did it occur? How can it be prevented? The whys lead to hows and suggest possible routes toward improvement.

Do not put faith in trying harder; you probably already are trying hard. Rather, figure out a different way to reach your objective. As the adage goes, rather than trying to be a better caterpillar, become a butterfly.

As a general rule you should stick with 10 or fewer standards, or the process becomes unwieldy and unfocused. Of course, your checklist standards will only be a small fraction of your activities. Your first PQC should focus on a few things you currently do that, if improved, could increase your customer satisfaction. Once you determine that you have those standards under control and customer satisfaction is high, then you can ask your colleagues and family for help in raising the bar and adding new standards. The approach is deceptively simple but powerful. Sergesteketter and Roberts report on a wide variety of successes by managers and executives from leading firms who have enjoyed success with the personal quality checklist approach. Draw up your own checklist and give it a try!

### Sample Manager PQC

- On time for meetings
- Never need a haircut
- Answer phone in two rings
- No more than one project on desk at time
- Shoes always shined
- Weight below 190 pounds
- Exercise at least three times a week

## Sample College Student PQC

- No more than 10 hours of TV viewing a week
- Use stairs instead of elevator for four floors or less
- Follow up job contacts within 24 hours
- Stick to one subject when studying, do not hop around
- In bed before midnight on all school nights
- Pay bills on time
- Make a to-do list for the next day before turning in

*Too many people overvalue what they are not and undervalue what they are.*

—Malcolm Forbes

### Focus on Strengths, Not Just Weaknesses

Getting assessment feedback can be humbling, and sometimes even discouraging, so it is particularly important to not focus on just the gaps or weaknesses in your profile. Of course, some focus on weak areas is often appropriate, but it is all too easy to become obsessed with the negative feedback. Indeed, some recent authors have made the case that a “deficit reduction” or problem fixing approach may actually hinder personal effectiveness.<sup>44</sup> Rather, they contend individuals are better served by recognizing and building on their strengths and *managing*, rather than obsessively trying to improve their weaknesses.

Managing a weakness means taking ownership of it and acknowledging it both as a weakness and as part of you. Rather than trying to make it a strength, aim to find ways to minimize its impact on you. Such strategies can include doing it as little as possible, engaging others for whom the characteristic is a strength, and developing and using support systems and tools to compensate (for example, become a zealot for a practical time management system if managing time is a weakness for you). The key point, and the one that is often the most productive, is placing your focus on your strengths and those things you can realistically change.



## MANAGEMENT LIVE 1.5

## Identifying and Crafting Your Own Personal Brand

Back in 1997, Tom Peters wrote an article in *Fast Company* titled “The Brand Called You.” In the article, he said:

It’s time for me—and you—to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that’s true for anyone who is interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work. Regardless of age, regardless of position, regardless of the business we happen to be in, all of us need to understand the importance of branding. We are CEOs of our own companies, Me, Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You. It’s that simple—and that hard. And that is inescapable.

Since that time, the emergence of social media on the Internet have made Mr. Peters’ call to action even more relevant and created a whole industry of personal branding consultants, speakers, and authors. While you may not yet be consciously creating an online presence, you may be surprised to find out what’s already out there on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, or in myriad other places. Many experts agree that online branding is not just for

celebrities (although certain celebrities seem to have practically invented the entire idea). In fact, as part of your efforts to enhance your own personal effectiveness, we challenge you to conduct the following personal-branding exercises.

1. Identify an individual who currently holds a position that you think you would aspire to in 5 or 10 years. This could be a person in your current organization or employed elsewhere. Search the Web for information on this person and write a brief summary of that person's "brand," as expressed in the information you find on the Web.
2. Search and summarize what is on the Internet today about you. You might start with Google and also check out Technorati for blogs and social media sites. Are there persons with the same name as you that come up in these searches? Would others be able to distinguish between you and those people with the same name?
3. If you were to get serious about building an online brand presence, what would you do? What brand would you hope to convey and why? What, if any, social media sites would you use? Would you develop a blog, and if so, what topics would you address and discuss?
4. How would you monitor your personal brand on the Web? Would any measures or sources of information be most useful?



## CASE CONCLUDED

The eHarmony Personality Profile questionnaire includes 258 questions that assess three primary personal characteristics: personality, values, and interests. Specific areas assessed include personal lifestyle preferences, communication style, family background, birth order, energy level, intelligence, spirituality, special interests, and future aspirations. eHarmony developed the Personality Profile by first generating a voluminous set of items asking people to report on most anything imaginable. They then had different people look at the items and pare them down, followed by small focus groups, and then larger groups to get some initial estimates of relevance and reliability.

Beyond completion of the questionnaire, eHarmony also requires members to proceed through what they call "guided communication." Guided communication was created because the company suspected that, if left on their own, people would gravitate to the most superficial questions, like sports or activities, but *not* to those issues that eHarmony had determined were most important to sustainable long-term relationships.

Guided communication leads potential couples through a formal process before ever allowing them to communicate directly, and the process is comprised of three distinct activities. First, each member of the pair is asked to choose five easy-to-answer questions from a list provided by eHarmony—and then send their responses to the other member.

Questions such as "If you were taken by your date to a party where you knew no one, how would you respond?" would be followed by multiple-choice answers, like (a) Stay close to my date, letting him/her introduce me; (b) Find a quiet spot and relax alone; (c) Strike out on my own and make friends; or (d) Ask my date if I could skip the event.

Once both parties answer, they move on to the next stage, where they are asked to exchange their personal list of "must haves" and "can't stands." In the final stage, the potential pair are asked to exchange three open-ended questions to allow for more detailed descriptions of respective values. eHarmony provides some sample questions, such as "What person in your life has been most inspirational and why?" or "Tell me about your closest friend. How long have you known them, and what do you like best about them?" But members can also write in their own questions.

Once this exchange is successfully completed, the two parties can move into "open communication." During open communication, the pair can send e-mails to each other, exchange photos, and prepare for their first meeting. A potential couple could then decide when, where, and how to meet in the offline world if they wanted to pursue a relationship. Moreover, at any point in the process, either party can "close" the match and cease any further contact. Given the number of opportunities to drop out, only 20 to 30 percent of matches ended up in open communication.



## CASE CONCLUDED (*continued*)

The result is that when people do meet in person to pursue the relationship they already have a collective history and many starting points for discussion. Indeed, eHarmony claims that, by the time people actually meet, it will feel like they already know each other quite well. And it seems to work. The company estimates that, on average, a successful subscriber takes four to six months to get matched to someone they will eventually marry and the company boasts of tens of thousands of happy marriages.

1. Do you see any parallels to the process eHarmony promotes that might be relevant for managing people or selecting teams or job choice?
2. Would you be concerned about people reporting things about themselves that were not true?

3. eHarmony contends that “opposites attract and then attack.” Explain this and support or refute the statement.
4. Note that all personal information revealed on eHarmony is *self-reported*. What are the pros and cons of self-reported information as a means of self-assessment?
5. Assume you had been through the eHarmony guided communication process and no dates emerged from your exchanges, how would you proceed? Should you address your weaknesses or build on your strengths, or both?

Sources: A Look Inside the eHarmony Love Lab. <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/OnCall/story?id=4280987&page=1>.

## Concluding Note

As we noted earlier, although sometimes characterized as being elementary or simply common sense, great management is neither common nor easy, and the existence of so many ineffective managers and toxic organizations attests to that.

Much of management deals with managing other people, but the subject of this opening chapter is about managing oneself. The most personally effective managers are those who are active learners, who know themselves and their strengths and weaknesses, and who act professionally in a way that develops and nurtures strong relationships. You will undoubtedly find it difficult to apply these principles all the time. But a large part of management is by example; managers who are not personally effective set the wrong example. Personal effectiveness is perhaps more a self-discipline than a complex learning task and is a lifetime endeavor. Great management starts with your personal effectiveness. Make it your first priority!

*It is easier to act yourself into a better way of feeling than to feel yourself into a better way of acting.*

—O. H. Mowrer

## KEY TERMS

ability 000  
 attention 000  
 Big E evidence 000  
 little e evidence 000  
 cognitive ability 000  
 conceptual competencies 000  
 evidence-based management 000  
 emotional intelligence 000  
 extraversion 000

interpersonal competencies 000  
 introversion 000  
 modeling 000  
 motivation 000  
 multisource feedback 000  
 organizational behavior 000  
 personality 000  
 positive self-talk 000  
 punishment 000

reciprocal determinism 000  
 reproduction 000  
 reward 000  
 self-management 000  
 self-observation 000  
 SMART goals 000  
 social learning theory 000  
 technical/administrative competencies 000



Adam Bryant conducted and condensed this interview. A longer version is at

[www.nytimes.com/2009/08/02/business/02corner.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/02/business/02corner.html). Published: August 1, 2009.

John T. Chambers, chairman and C.E.O. of Cisco Systems, has learned that big setbacks make great companies and great leaders.

**Q. What are the most important leadership lessons you've learned?**

A. People think of us as a product of our successes. I'd actually argue that we're a product of the challenges we faced in life. And how we handled those challenges probably had more to do with what we accomplish in life.

I had an issue with dyslexia before they understood what dyslexia was. One of my teachers, Mrs. Anderson, taught me to look at it like a curveball. The ball breaks the same way every time. Once you get used to it, you can handle it pretty well.

So I went from almost being embarrassed reading in front of a class—you lose your place, and I read right to left—to the point where I knew I could overcome challenges. I think it also taught me sensitivity toward others.

I learned another lesson from Jack Welch. It was in 1998, and at that time we were one of the most valuable companies in the world. I said, "Jack, what does it take to have a great company?" And he said, "It takes major setbacks and overcoming those."

I hesitated for a minute, and I said, "Well, we did that in '93 and then we did it again in '97 with the



## CASE

### In a Near-Death Event, a Corporate Rite of Passage

Asian financial crisis." And he said, "No, John. I mean a near-death experience." I didn't understand exactly what he meant.

Then, in 2001, we had a near-death experience. We went from the most valuable company in the world to a company where they questioned the leadership. And in 2003, he called me up and said, "John, you now have a great company." I said, "Jack, it doesn't feel like it." But he was right.

**Q. How has your leadership style evolved over time?**

A. I'm a command-and-control person. I like being able to say turn right, and we truly have 67,000 people turn right. But that's the style of the past. Today's world requires a different leadership style—more collaboration and teamwork, including using Web 2.0 technologies. If you had told me I'd be video blogging and blogging, I would have said, no way. And yet our 20-somethings in the company really pushed me to use that more.

**Q. Did you need to be pushed?**

A. I thought I was very leading-edge in terms of how I communicated. My team just kept pushing, and I finally said, "Why do you want me to do this?" And they said: "John, if you don't do it our company won't learn

how to do this. It won't be built into our DNA for the way we interface with customers, our employees. The top has to walk the talk." I was expecting text blogging and we did video blogging.

The first one was a little bit uncomfortable, because it's very unprofessional. You just basically put a camera there, and you go. By the second one, I realized this was going to transform communications—not just for the C.E.O., but it would change how we do business.

**Q. You mentioned Jack Welch. Who else do you rely on for advice?**

A. My wife. She has a way of picking me up when I get knocked on my tail. But also if I get a little bit overconfident, she brings me back to earth.

The other day, I was practicing a concept with her and saying, "You know, there are two major mistakes that I make and Cisco makes repeatedly." She looked at me and she said, "Only two?" My mistakes are always around moving too slow, or moving too fast without process behind it. And it's something that, if we're not careful, we'll repeat again and again.

**Q. How do you hire?**

A. First thing I want to ask you about: tell me about your results. I

never get hard work confused with success. So I'd walk you through the successes, and what did you do right. I'd also ask you to tell me about your failures. And that's something people make a tremendous mistake on. First, all of us have had mistakes and failures. And it's surprising how many people say, "Well, I can't think of one." That immediately loses credibility. It's the ability to be very candid on what mistakes they've made, and then the question is, what would you do differently this time?

Then I ask them who are the best people you recruited and developed, and where are they today? Third, I try to figure out if they're really oriented around the customer. Are they driven by the customer, or is the customer just somebody who gets in the way?

And I look at their communication skills, and one of the largest parts of communications is . . . what?

**Q. Listening?**

A. You betcha. Seeing how they listen, and are they willing to challenge you? And then I look at their knowledge in industry segments, especially the area I'm interested in.

**Q. What's changed in the last few years?**

A. Big time, the importance of collaboration. Big time, people who have teamwork skills, and their use of technology. If they're not collaborative, if they aren't naturally inclined toward collaboration and teamwork, if they are uncomfortable with using technology to make that happen both within Cisco and in their own life, they're probably not going to fit in here.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What two major lessons would you take from learning about John Chambers and his background and career at Cisco? What surprised you about his background and perspectives?
2. How would Mr. Chambers contend that you treat setbacks and failures? Should you talk about them in a job interview?
3. What does Mr. Chambers think are the biggest changes in the workforce today? What implications does that have for your personal development and career success?
4. Invite a leading manager in your area to be interviewed. Ask similar questions that were asked of Mr. Chambers and compare and contrast the responses.

## SELECT MANAGE WHAT? DEBRIEFS

### Making the Business Case for People Management Skills: Debrief

The overall theme of your response should be that there are very strong and documented relationships between people management quality and important firm variables like turnover, applicant attraction, citizenship behavior, performance, and productivity. The Great Places to Work institute has even found relationships between lower health care costs and safety records and customer satisfaction.

Perhaps most impressively, there is a very strong relationship between people management satisfaction and *financial performance*. For example, the charts in the text show that if you invested in just the 100 Best Places to Work in America—rated such in large part because of the quality of their people management practices—you would get a financial return of better than twice the standard market indices over the same period. That is particularly powerful data because people management practices (for example, training, family-friendly benefits, perks like subsidized vacations, sabbaticals, meals, and so on) are quite expensive and might be thought to therefore *lower* the net financial performance of firms that spend in those ways. But, in fact, those firms still dramatically *outperform* the market—simply because they attract, retain, and motivate the best people to do the best work.

With respect to how we know who the good managers are, employee ratings (360 feedback and other sources) that look at employee satisfaction (not just happiness) with their supervision are pretty good indicators. A critical point is that it is ratings of *immediate managers*—not some general index of culture or management or

leadership—that makes all the difference. So if a manager’s direct reports say that he/she sets clear expectations, supports their work, provides regular feedback, respects them as human beings, communicates important information to them and distributes rewards fairly, it is safe to say that they are providing the type of people management that will yield positive outcomes for the firm.

One other potentially powerful point is that, with no other information to the contrary, we can probably assume that this firm is *average* in its people management performance. If so, that means that probably 50 percent of people in the firm are currently less than satisfied with their current manager, and probably less than 25 percent of managers engage in the people management basics at least once a week.

So, the overall point is that money spent on people management development (for example, the selection of managers, management development, mentoring, rewards geared to the success and development of others, and so on) would be well directed and, if well spent, would certainly have the potential for impact on a par with investments in product development, technology, and so on. The quote in the book, “nothing is more important in the life of a firm than the way people feel about how they are managed” is an apt synthesis of all this.

### Using OB Evidence Instead of Just Intuition: Debrief

A good goal for every organizational decision, and certainly for managers, is to try and be more evidence-based in your decisions. That is, your ultimate objective should be to find ways to make the right decision more often than not. One way to do this is to adopt an “*evidence-based decision making*” (EBM) approach, as discussed in this chapter. This form of decision making rejects using gut feeling and relying on past limited personal experience and instead is based on seeking available evidence.

Perhaps the major obstacle to EBM is that in many organizations it often runs counter to the way things are currently done. A great deal that passes as “best practice” most likely is not. In some cases, there simply is no evidence to support what is thought to be best practice. In other cases, there is evidence to support that what are thought to be best practices are, in fact, inferior practices. In short, most organizations do not practice evidence-based management. As a result, they often underperform with respect to their major stakeholders: employees, investors, and the community.

Although there are many specifics and nuances to becoming more evidence-based in your decision style, three strategies are particularly important: (1) Do not jump to conclusions, seek and ask for evidence; (2) know the different types of evidence; (3) evaluate your decisions.

*Do not jump to conclusions.* Perhaps the biggest, and most elusive, element in using EBM is to be able to mitigate the natural human tendency to rely on first instincts and our own experience or a compelling testimonial, and instead to actually seek evidence. Thus, when someone says “research shows” or the “evidence is clear,” great managers know to dig a little deeper to seek out that evidence. At the end of the day, anecdotes and previous experience may be all that is available to help inform decisions, but in far too many cases anecdotes are used where a rich scientific literature exists to help make better decisions. This text, for example, relies heavily on the scientific base of knowledge that exists in Organizational Behavior.

*Understand the different types of evidence.* One easy way to understand the usefulness of evidence is to make a distinction between Big E evidence and little e evidence. *Big E evidence* refers to generalizable knowledge regarding cause and effect connections derived from scientific methods. Big E evidence is based upon years of studies, across many different types of samples or contexts with many different types of jobs, people, and organizations. Most importantly, Big E evidence represents a form of research that is *systematic*—meaning that it is planned and methodical and avoids drawing conclusions simply on the basis of opinion or anecdote. Such evidence is often summarized in large scientific literature reviews or empirical summaries known as meta-analyses or “studies of studies.” Big E evidence is likely to be the best source for informing practices since it is drawn from years of study across large populations under varying circumstances.

In contrast, *little e evidence* represents local or organizational specific data collection efforts to inform a specific decision. Popular quality improvement processes such as Six Sigma provide little e evidence; important information that helps the organization but that may not generalize or translate into other arenas or other organizations. Examples abound of organizations who failed by trying to apply a practice that while wildly successful in another organization didn’t take hold in their own. Thus, while little e evidence may improve decision making in any organization, we must be careful not to apply it broadly.

*Evaluate your decisions and create a culture of EBM.* No true EBM can exist without some systematic evaluation of decisions. That is, once decisions are made, how did it go? What worked and didn't work? What additional evidence will we have to inform future decisions? When managers take an evidence-based approach, they contribute to an organization that values and encourages active participation in the evidence-based process.

### Describing Yourself and Your Style: Expanding Your Self-Awareness: Debrief

There are, of course, an almost infinite number of things you could talk about (education, past jobs, hobbies, and so on) in responding to the question "Tell us about yourself." As a result, rambling and unfocused responses to that question are all too common. The key is to try and focus on those elements of your personality, background, and experience that would be *directly relevant* to your role as a manager.

A good place to start would be to work through Tool Kit 1.5—Advancing Your Self-Awareness, which directs you to a set of self-assessment instruments and then poses questions regarding each area of assessment. Having completed the assessments and addressed those related questions, you should be able to talk in an informed way about your critical-thinking capacity, your personality characteristics and preferences, what you value most, your emotional and cultural competence, and/or your career orientation.

It is important to note here that there really is no one preferred managerial profile—and that is not just sugar-coated "nice talk." Most personal profiles can be adapted in ways to be successful in most situations, but to do so it is critical that you are fully aware of your personal profile—and very few young managers rarely are. Moreover, you need to be able to translate your profile into an understanding of the implications (both strengths and potential liabilities) of that profile for success in a particular managerial role. For example, if your personality is especially extroverted, you may excel in stimulating ideas and dealing with people, but are challenged in listening to others and paying attention to details. If you value collective behavior and cooperation, you may wish to seek contexts where such values are embraced and rewarded relative to solely individual outcomes. If your analytical ability is below average, you may wish to leverage other strengths and partner with colleagues who have more refined analysis skills to complement your profile. Reflect on the type of situations where you been most successful and be aware of when and how you have been able to adapt your personal style to be effective in different situations.

Most importantly, you should feel no compulsion to suggest that you are something you are *not*—indeed that is a recipe for managerial failure. Rather, you want to accurately convey who you are and then determine how best to leverage your strengths and mitigate your weaknesses to excel in any given situation. And always start by focusing on your strengths—research has shown that it is both easier and far more productive to leverage your strengths than to try to "fix" your weaknesses.

Finally, although a self-assessed profile gives you a means of framing your different personal characteristics and orientations in a logical and focused way, such self-assessments are only one "lens" on yourself. It is also important to include actual examples of how you have behaved in ways that are consistent with your profile, as well as external feedback from sources *outside yourself*. That is, your credibility is enhanced if you can provide external validation of your self-assessment, and examples of how you have, say, shown conscientiousness in an actual work situation, or found ways to complement your strengths (and compensate for weaknesses) with the differing strengths of others, or clarified your preferences in ways that facilitated the accomplishment of a team goal. Ideally, you will be able to create your own personal story that conveys who you are in an informed way that paints a picture of a manager we would want to be led by.